

Shelley Lee PodCAST Transcript

KARA:

Hello and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing, communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the college, and today, we have a chance to talk to Shelly Lee. Shelly is an alum of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and currently serves as Executive Director camp Hope Foundation. Welcome and thank you for being here.

SHELLEY:

Thank you so much. I am so happy to be here and excited about the discussion that we'll have today.

KARA:

It's going to be fun. Let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

SHELLEY:

Well, I am from small town, Mackinac, and I will tell you that my parents did not attend college, and so I really didn't know a lot about college at that time, and so it was pretty excited when a couple of people told me about ISU and that there was a possibility for me being able to attend there. So I really hadn't looked into many other choices. I knew I did want to go to a four year university. So ISU was my number one choice. I just started there.

KARA:

And then tell us. How did you find child life? I think relatively speaking, it's a pretty small field. How did you find that that was the major for you?

SHELLEY:

Well, I tell you, it was a very small field at that time and actually a very new career. So I had gone all the way through college, and actually started as a music major. I wanted to major in music, and then quickly switched over to possibly teaching. I just wasn't sure throughout college, and I think that's the awesome thing about ISU, is the fact that I was able to explore different things throughout the time that I was there. So I kind of went from music then on into possibly teaching, but then just landed in the Family and Consumer Sciences realm. My goal was at that time to be a daycare director. I just knew I wanted to work with children. I had an amazing professor that was actually my counselor at that time. She kind of mentored me through and I think we had a meeting. It was the beginning of my senior year, and she said, Have you ever heard of the field Child Life? And I said, No, I'd never heard of it at all. She goes, Well, come into my office. Let's talk about this a little bit more. And we sat down and we looked into it, and she goes, the really cool thing is, I'm still learning about it. She said, but there's a position in Peoria. There's only one in this area, and a person named Lori Fuller was in that position in Peoria, and she goes, Why don't you reach out to her see if she would do an internship for you if you're interested in this? I'm like, I am so interested in this because I really wanted to do more than be a daycare director, but I just wasn't sure what that would look like. So I contacted her. I talked to her over the phone. We went and had an in person, like quick, brief interview, and she said, Yes, I'll take you as an intern. So I did 460 hour internship with her, and so that's where I found out about child life. But yes, it was a very, relatively small position. In fact, the I ended up working with Child Life and working at Methodist Hospital at that point, it was now Unity Point, probably getting a little ahead of myself.

KARA:

No, that's great. I love hearing that story: how just one conversation really changed the trajectory for you and changed your path. I think that's really special. And like you said, kind of speaks to the connections that people build here at ISU and here on campus, and I think that's a great story. Thank you for sharing. So while you were here, how were you involved on campus? I'm especially curious with the shifting of different majors and trying to find your place on campus. What did that look like for you outside of the classroom?

SHELLEY:

Well, like I said, I started as a music major, and my focus at that time was music. Prior to that, I had been really interested in sports, but thought there's no way I'd be able to make it on a team, a sports team at ISU, so I just shifted into music, and that was something I just had a lot of passion for. From there, I thought again that I would be a music major, but then when I got involved in the field, I'm like, I really just enjoy singing. I don't enjoy learning about, you know, music theory and all of that, what it entails. So from there on, I just joined the concert choir, and I joined madrigals, and I joined a couple other small groups. So same with all of those, but my very most favorite was being an ISU medical I think we kind of, you know, had a really high standard to be involved in that group. It was a small group, and we were able to travel to England, Scotland and Ireland with Dr Farrell. We had some amazing experiences. That was probably my favorite thing to do on campus.

KARA:

Oh my gosh, and to get to see the world on top of it, that's so exciting. What would you say you miss the most about your time on campus, about being a student and really being able to immerse yourself in that experience?

SHELLEY:

Well, coming from a small family that had not a lot of resources. I had to work full time. So I worked. I took the highest course load I could take. So I took 18 hours. I worked 40 hours, and then I was also involved in music as well. So my, my whole college career was very, very busy, and I didn't have a lot of time for socialization. I wish that, you know, I mean, I kind of changing your question a little bit. I wish I would have had a little bit more time for socialization in college that some of the kids have. But I also gained a strong work ethic and and learned to, you know, manage my time well. But what my favorite thing on campus was, was to be involved in the extracurricular, you know, the music, the madrigals, that was my favorite part, and that's what I miss the most.

KARA:

Hearing you talk about your schedule and all of your involvement and your work, tell me if you were to give a piece of advice to a college student that's struggling with time management, what would you say? It sounds like you found a successful way to find a balance. What did that look like for you?

SHELLEY:

I did find a balance, and I did find mentors that kind of mentored me through not only professors, because they had some really great professors, but I also had some student mentors that we just naturally bonded. And I think that was really important. Find those people that build you up. And those people that are driven for success, you know, I mean, you can go to a university with that intent that you know, a lot of young adults have their their thinking, you know, it's going to be a great time and and hopefully I come out with a degree on the other end of this, but I just really connected to those that were driven as well, and I think that's important to find people that fill your cup and and just make you a stronger person. So, you know, I had some of those people that got me through high school, and again, I just had that thought process. You know, if I'm going to get through this, I need those people to help me find my way and to build me up. And Sandra Gosh was one of my family consumer science. She was the one that, you know, really told me about the career. She was also one of those people that, you know, I didn't spend a lot of time with her, but the time that I spent with her was amazing, because she really, kind of, you know, helped me funnel into the career path that I needed to go. She just knew me as a student, and then that helped me a lot as well.

KARA:

And I know you started to touch on this a little bit earlier. I want to talk about the initial job search. So you did this giant internship, 460 hours, feels like a lot. What did that job search process look like for you after that? And then tell us again where you ended up?

SHELLEY:

Well, I'm probably not the best example for this, because I was so blessed in that, you know, Sandra Gosh told me about the position I did, the internship, fortunately for me, the week that I because I went through summer classes and I ended up graduating at the

end of the summer and got married the same day that the actual graduation would have been but anyway, two weeks later, after that internship was completed, The people at Unity Point was Methodist Hospital called me and they said, Hey, this position is now open. Would you like it? And I said, Yeah, I would love that position, because that was just once I did that internship. I knew this is where I would be. This was my mission and calling in life. So I was pretty excited about that. So yeah, I didn't even have to interview, interview for that job. I was offered the job over the phone immediately, so I hopefully made an impression on them, that they really liked the work that I did, but they they hired me on the spot, and I started, you know, like the next Monday, and I was there for 32 years after that.

KARA:

Yeah, I think that speaks volumes to the type of work that you do, and the impression that you left, and yeah, 32 year career there. That's pretty impressive. So what made you take the leap to your current position? Then what did that transition look like for you?

SHELLEY:

Well, it was a very natural transition, so I worked you need a point, but then very quickly that changed over within like, a year and a half, I changed over it working at the St Jude Midwest affiliate. So I ended up moving with the St Jude affiliate in Peoria. I moved with them four different times and so to their current location. Now they're located at OSF St Francis. And so I. Was there with them at OSF for the remainder of my career, for the 32 years. So I had one year of I worked at gift of hope, which actually is really interesting transition, because I just was kind of looking for something different. I had felt like with Child Life. It's kind of difficult, because you get to a point where you've been in the career for a long time, and there's really no, no nowhere else to progress to. You know, I was looking for more. I wanted to advance in my career, and so I just, there was no more advancements. So I just thought, you know, it's time for a change. So I worked at gift of hope, and I was a donation liaison for one year, found out that that was really not my thing. However, they did enjoy the skills that I brought to that job, and so they've hired since then, they've hired multiple child life specialists into that position afterwards, because we have the capacity and the ability to talk to families in very

difficult situations. So doing that donation process and talking families through that was something a skill set that they wanted with with Child Life. But anyway, so I did that for a year. That's a very difficult position to be in. And so I just thought, you know, this is probably not for me. And at the very same time, there was some so I had throughout my career, even though I was a child life specialist, I had also done camp for kids with cancer and blood disorders, and I've been involved in another camp, and just had been like a program director and helping with that camp, but that was really since the beginning of my career. In 1989 is when I started doing that. So for almost my whole career, I did take a couple years off to have children, but after that, I was right back at camp and doing camp with the kids. My passion and love is to help see these kids, not only, you know, thrive and survive, but just have those moments where they're connecting with other kids in that camp setting. It's like no other it's something that lasts for a lifetime. These relationships do so it was something that's always been a passion of mine. And so when the gift of hope thing was kind of wrapping up, their opportunity became available that we had started this camp called Camp hope, and the person that was doing the fundraising for camp hope was stepping aside, and so she said, here's a foundation with with a little bit of money, and it would you like to take that over? So that's really how I transitioned into the role that I'm in right now. So to kind of summarize, I've had two positions where I really did not have to interview at all for a job. I just was kind of handed this and blessed with a beautiful situation so well.

KARA:

And something you touched on briefly was, you know, how hard that work can be and how important it is that you're able to have these conversations with families that are potentially in difficult situations. So I know, you know, Child Life can be kind of an emotionally heavy lift for the people doing the work. How do you regulate your own emotions to make sure that your work does not take over that part of your life?

SHELLEY:

That's a very good question, because throughout my career, I was the person that once the physician gave the news that your child has this diagnosis, a cancer diagnosis or whatever, and no matter what that diagnosis or prognosis might be, I then was the

person that followed up with and here's how we're going to help you. And so I had the conversation with them. Here's, you know, we do still have hope. So it is a very difficult, as you said, heavy lift for a person, I think that your character has to be really spot on for this position. It isn't for everyone and and you just general conversations with people on the street, most people will tell you that is not a position I could do, but it is a position that I feel very strongly about, and I feel like you need to have very, very good boundaries. And you need to have good, you know, time management and, you know, self regulation. You need to be able to manage your own emotions really well and then be able to turn it off at the end of the day. And even though you pour your whole heart, I mean, that sounds awful, you turn it off and walk away, in essence, you do, but it that piece of your heart is still there with those families. So I didn't take it home to my family. However, my heart was always with these patients, and so I don't like to ever turn anything off. Yet, I do want to, like, shut it down for the day and then focus on my family, focus on my gardening, focus, focus on other things that bring me joy, and

KARA:

I heard you mention gardening. Tell me how you prioritize your own well being. I'm assuming that's a passion project for you. What advice do you have for students going into the field to prioritize their own well being as well? So for. How do you do it? How can a student take a hold of that too?

SHELLEY:

I think it is more difficult now than it was prior to this. So my advice to students would be to find that other, something outside of work that you love, just like gardening. And I also pour myself into my community. I'm a volleyball coach. I was a softball coach. I poured myself into my church. So I have a lot of other things going that balances my life, and of course, my family is first so but I do try to balance my life very well and pour myself into everything I do, so I kind of just move on to the very next thing and just keep keep working hard. I find keeping my mind active is really important. I'm not a huge reader, but I do like try to read and keep myself that the reading that I do is more current, current, like just keeping myself current in what's going on in our field, but keeping myself active in the field is really helpful to handle situations. So that's what

another thing that I would recommend that students do and keep yourself you know, in your off time, fill your cup with other things, make sure that you bring joy to yourself and your family. You know, have a release somewhere else besides your job, you you have to be able to shut that down and stay healthy so that you're healthy enough to handle the next day.

KARA:

And what would you say? Your favorite part of your job is

SHELLEY:

making kids smile.

KARA:

I love that short and sweet and so rewarding. That's a great answer. What do you think the most challenging part of your job is?

SHELLEY:

You know, I will tell you, having worked in the healthcare field, everyone is there with the same goal to help the patients, just just to be helping these patients and helping these families. We all care about the same goal. I think that everybody comes about it in different ways, and I think that that is a more challenging way, because we all want to do the same thing, and sometimes coming together on that can be difficult. That that would be, what I would say is, you know, helping manage those different personalities is probably the more challenging thing in healthcare field.

KARA:

That makes perfect sense. Well, Shelly, we are going to finish with a speed round. So just go with your first instinct on these questions. What is your go-to lazy dinner?

SHELLEY:

Probably making homemade pizza. I like to make that, and it's pretty fast and easy.

KARA:

When are you the most productive

SHELLEY:

I have my- the most ideas late at night, but most productive in the morning.

KARA:

And what are you? I know you said you're not a big reader, so maybe there's a podcast. Are you reading or listening to? Anything right now that you would recommend?

SHELLEY:

I'm in between books, but the next book that I'm trying to get because I've been had a lot of events. I do fundraising events and the different things, and we just had camp. And so my next book on my list is Be The Unicorn, you know, separating leaders and helping them to be driven people. I'm just really interested in being a great leader.

KARA:

That sounds definitely worth adding to the staff. To read for sure, if I were to ask you to describe yourself in three words, what would you say?

SHELLEY:

Definitely hardworking, resourceful and probably very driven.

KARA:

And I ask everybody that comes on the podcast Avantis gondola or pub 2 cheese balls.

SHELLEY:

Pub 2 cheese balls.

KARA:

One last question for you, if you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

SHELLEY:

Go with your passion, whatever that passion is, you know, go for it. Find those along the way that will help you strive to be that excellent person.

KARA:

Thank you for that advice, and thanks again for being here. That was Shelley Lee, Executive Director of the camp Hope Foundation. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our CAST alumni.